SEXY TRAIN THINGS

MACKENZIE BOYER

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Smoke

I used to pretend birthday candles were
L I t cigarettes
Removing frosting from
each
butt
My tongue searching for menthol vapor
memories
To ease the harsh tar of a burnt up childhood

Born in January
I would fight to remind those black hole eyes
The year starts with me
My big bang birthday
We'd measure our height on the door just to
feel inches wiser
Puff our chests feeling samsaraed hearts
Burgeon with extinguished candles, the
Marlboro Veda

But I used to love **SO BIG**
that when they told me inhaling my wishes
Could shrink my heart,
I smoked my first birthday cake.
I make no illusions about this cigarette.
It won't
be
the
last.
For a moment, I'll bathe
Awash in the scent of grandparents lost to
shadow lungs
Feel the creak of ancient stairs, tracing j
l

G
S
A
w
puzzle lives
Glued to fading walls
Touch raspberried fingers and sparkler lit
dreaming

You told me I was a star picked from a dying
galaxy
So my exhales echo *Kepler* and *syzygy* and
nadir
As I ash out the supernova in my fingertips
and
My lungs burn photo negative sepias

You ask me why I smoke
I wish I could tell you I needed a way to
connect
We can relate through our vices now,
comparing
EEGs
We have our scars in common
Is there anything more cancerous than
loneliness
What's another smoke? We can't filter our
sadness
Can't put a surgeon general's warning on
depression
Can't ban suicide.
I wish I wasn't a candle at the end of my wick
Waxing poetic specters of once easy breath

I shuffle my feet, flick the last of everything
into January

Borrow your lighter, I'm running low on fuel.
The flame ballets all charcoal and bright
Cigarette a bowing
hangnail and I tell you
It's my birthday

Beepolar

My head is a beehive.
Hornet's nest is too malevolent.
Can I tell you about all the flowers?
Have I told you how hard it is to fly
sometimes?

I recently found the page in the DSM
that names my waning
and waxing
Bipolar.
Buzzing.
Even with a name...
Bipolar is too sticky for dichotomy
I am less
Jekyll
And Hyde
More flutter
and smashed in honeycomb
Just Zipping at a million selves a second
Or struggling to shed the weight of my
exoskeleton
I am so fast. So clever. Busy as a bee.

I haven't given up on my head yet;
None of this is pretty.
My support system is covered in bee sting.
I always pray they're not allergic.
Whether the foot stomps bee
Or the bee stabs toe,
The bee still dies.
For a bee, even self-defense is suicide.
Trying to defend myself from myself
Has made me a killer bee.

The last mania lasted six weeks
What do you mean I'm bugging out?
What do you mean my eyes are too big?
I'm not whirring, I just have a lot to say
I have to say it all. I don't know how long this will last.

I spend the time I have in half denial that I will lose this buzz
Navigating on wind
I am everywhere
I am spring time
I am buzzing. And piercing things.
Going from doing everything
To planning out my death
Is so erratic
I might as well be insect
I never thought "sensitive" would go from understatement
To misdiagnosis
The bee is too much antenna
Not enough stinger

The last depression lasted four months.
I didn't say much.
Never needed to make a buzz.
I was better at suffer in silence.
I'm a worker bee.
Some days I just watch cheek-length rivers run
Some days I don't feel like writing metaphors

None of this is pretty
Life is not beautiful,
Without being painful
This is so painful

This is colony collapse disorder
This is yellow-nicotined worry
And black lung coping striped across a lifetime. Sometimes, it plays at cute
I have been piercing orifici and tattooing
Patronuses and dancing vividly
And yet. The buzz.
Is sometimes too heavy to bee-
Never updraft
Always raindrop.

Life is
At least always trying to find a way
Searching for something beautiful and fragrant
Like an overarching metaphor
That stabs you in the foot.
I only just heard bipolar
But I could always destroy myself
Smashing headfirst into
Garden-wall desk-edge car-door
Shower-tile car-door wood-floor
Car-door Garden-wall wood-floor

I promise I'm not deadly,
just practicing my nose dive
I haven't made a final,
deathly approach,
But I make flower petal landing strips.

Haunting

I am a paranormal specialist
Investigating this polaroid life
Unsurprised
At sepiad tree ring traumas
Still tattooed by belt marks
A sharp eyed specter watcher
I practice finding phantoms in photographs
And wonder who the ghost is
Standing where I should be

I don't recognize this ectoplasm
You've said you see right through me
And
I have never felt more poltergeist
And

I wonder if angels keep their fake accents
I wonder if I'm the only one who can't
recognize their own shadow
I wonder who else here has tried to kill more
than their name
I wonder why the rope wasn't enough
Why the pills came back up
Why I am
Haunting my own house

Doors shut by themselves
Lights flicker on

And off
On and off
Like a heart that wasn't planning a continued
cadence
Like I had died when I planned to
Like I had died when I tried to

Trainsgender

My brother says "you're still my brother, right"
Erasing the joy I felt just moments early
When the cis women at the party embrace me
As one of their own.
I was there right after long hours laying track
Driving spikes, shame buried under dirt and grease
I am surviving these days in moments of
Lipstick reapplied and lace in secret places
Polished nails under work gloves

The railroad boss says trans people are dangerous
Fallacies his way from surgery to suicides
I don't tell him about the dreams where my boy parts
Are separated from this beautiful dissarray
Instead I swing the spike hammer
This is the girliest job I could find, there is noone stronger than a woman
There is glitter on the tracks

The mountain is a woman
She holds up the sky
Broad shouldered and granite heart
We speak the language of getting over
Getting through, raising up
I am raising myself
And this is my transgression
The audacity to live all eyeshadow and floral adornment
Tell my brother I have always been his sister

Tell the foreman that rail ties are women's work.

I am a woman at work on the railroad
At work on myself
The cog trains have crawled up Pikes Peak since 1891
Trans people have always existed
And I am not crawling
I am lifting breaking building
Glitter and granite
Grease and get through
Diesel heart and aspen grove lungs

Swinging a hammer, still a woman
There are 20,000 ties that need replacing
There are 20,000 parts of me that need replacing
The railroad and me
The mountain and me
Are always in transition
I am glitter on the tracks
The most beautiful thing on the mountain

Cardiacoustics

August

Bijou street chatters a clattering
Timpanic moonlight
Cigarette solstices in season
We are just dreams and bones
The walking blues
Anxiety with skin on
Mortum procrastinatum
Pizzicatto plectrum a t o m ic pendulum
Teleological
Never unpacking your boxes
All we want is to be in two places at once
Setting timers for our demise
The whispered tarot of "you saw this coming"
A fortress built of our nothings

September

Caterpillar and
Sepulchre of the calendar
Harvest winds
Chinook
Alpine breath
Sputtering melt

October

Doorjambs
Crumbs
Rumpled bedsheets
Seething and
Sheathes
Leaves crisped and crinkled
Patting mascara drip with soft padding fingertip
Tearstained refrains in the key of autumn leaving
Falling again with whispered withers
"You have to know the sound of my heartbreak"

This Happen

My best friend asks me about being trans
Asks me how this could happen to anyone
As if my gender is just something that happens
And not the chrysanthemum recognizing her own bloom
Petals splayed reaching for radiance
A head on collision and not the god damn highway itself
As if it's possible to separate a soul into her component parts
And label them anything other than miraculous

My transness is not happening to me
Any more than salt happens to the sea
Any more than blood happens to the heart
And my heart is not boy not girl
Just supernova made muscle
Fist pumping infinity
Just like yours
And I don't know how that could happen to anyone

It just does
We just live, an aspen grove aspirating together
Saluting the same sunlight
It just happens
Like breath
Like love
Like the ocean in endless respiration

Hope is genderless
Love is trans
As in transformative
As in transmissive

That's what's happening
I am not a molting in progress or a cocoon bursting into realization
I am as inevitable as hope
As present as breath
And as big as the ocean
How could this happen to anyone

Meditations on Chronic Pain

1. If pain is weakness leaving the body, I must have been so weak. I must still be so weak.

2. My muscles remember the wrong things. My arm bears IV tattoos but I can't keep the imprint of their lips from fading. Pain is never having enough ink to make your love permanent.

3. If pain is your body telling you something is wrong, message received. Use your inside voice next time.

4. My mind is on the last train home. We're all going to the same place, where everything adds up to freckles and stray eyelashes.

5. We stayed up until we passed out on hotel couches. I remember just trying to forget wanting to die. You are one of the few who say my name free of apprehension.

6. I remember how you kissed me as if I couldn't read lips.

7. Pain writes a prose that sticks to soft consonants. I have been present for four last breaths. The lips are the last thing a soul touches. I guess I've listened to a few souls.

Railroads and Skeptics

When you start this job
The train is still symbolic,
Still metaphor, still stand-in for adventure
You are unyet grease stained
And just one giant splinter away from the white flag
Or the pink slip
It will take time to correct the recurring thought
That each day is the hardest day you've ever had.
One night, you will chain smoke expensive cigarettes with a skeptic
But you will start believing in the realness of things
The tangibility of your body
When the brakes on the train give up before your heart
When you are the train and the hill and the heart all at once
And maybe the train still runs on analogy
And you become the wood and steel and diesel
A proud Sisyphean monument to yourself
Maybe we are all just chain smoking our own fears
Maybe we are all born skeptics who haven't done enough digging.

Stay (For Chan)

"Sunrise means survival
and I'll see you in the morning for breakfast"
Susan Peiffer

It's okay to hurt
I tell you knowing all too well
The metallic taste of an early exit
Having also drawn the shades over my heart
Lest anyone see its bloody condition
Having left the note
Having sought the steel edge
Having made the pharmaceutical calculus.

I always remember the first time someone says they love me.
This time it sounds like
"I stayed because you're here" standing at the bridge
Talking the world down from jumping.
When you are among the reasons someone stays,
I love you becomes a promise
A sunrise phone call, a delicate detox
Coming slowly into this young moon night.
When we are all that we need,
This momentous tenderness only happens if we're still breathing
My liege, my ever spicy human.

I want to stitch "stay" on your eyelids
Want to whisper an overture of "this isn't over yet"

You've just got to make it one more day forever
Make each moment a little prayer, a paper crane
The tremendous victory of gentleness over despair

It's okay, I tell you
To want to swerve to the next available exit
And I can't take the wheel
But I am car crash enough for both of us
And I know that to live is to know precipice.

Between us, nine people we love have killed themselves.
We've seen this world steal the light from tender lives
But we contain more than the everness of loss
We are the miraculous now
The porchlight glow
And our holy bodies
And aren't we so wild
And aren't we so much bigger than we ever thought we could be
Isn't staying alive the loudest way to sing "I love you"
Isn't every kiss a warning shot against our own extinctions.

Sometimes a forest needs a fire to remember how to grow
Sometimes the hurt is all we know.
This time, I sheathed the knife, dumped the pills,
To avoid being one more who left you
And MY GOD we keep staying

We're still kissing. Still shooting stars and
painted tires and fireflies and American spirits.
Still alive.
And I think that must be love.
And I think that it still hurts sometimes.
And I think that it's okay to stay.

Mackenzie is a queer poet and activist who lives at the foot of Pikes Peak. She breathes easiest in mountain air and feels most free in gentle company. Puddles and shooting stars are what she dreams of. *Sexy Train Things* is her first collection of poems.